



Wisconsin Main Street Case Study

Economic Restructuring

Putting Customer Parking First West Bend

West Bend officials, the West Bend Police Department, and the Downtown West Bend Association all shared the perception that there was not enough downtown parking. However, when the Downtown West Bend Association chose parking expert John Edwards for their Wisconsin Main street-sponsored technical visit in 2001, his expert opinion was West Bend had plenty of parking it just needed to utilize space better. "Every spot in front of your business is worth between \$17,000 to \$20,000 per year," said John Edwards, citing national statistics on consumer spending.

After nearly two years of work, the "Customers First" parking plan went into effect on November 15, 2002. "Tier 1" parking in the downtown is now for customers only and has no time limit. Business owners and employees must park in "Tier 2" areas, leaving prime parking for customers. All employees, full or part time, permanent or temporary, are required to register their primary vehicle. A community service officer utilizing a hand-held computer containing those registered license plate numbers handles enforcement. Parking by downtown employees within the Tier 1 Parking Zone may be allowed if they hang a "Shopping" tag from their rearview mirror and if they are actually within the downtown for a purpose not related to their downtown employment.

The City of West Bend believed that providing unlimited, free, premium parking for visitors and customers of the downtown shopping district would make it easier and more pleasurable to shop and dine downtown thereby aiding in the revitalization of downtown. They also believed that making parking more convenient for downtown visitors would increase the number of visitors and customers downtown leading to improved economic viability and increased property values downtown which would in turn stabilize and strengthen the City's property tax base. The West Bend Daily News may have said it best, "The proposal recognizes the economic value of parking as well as the influence of our individual and collective conduct on each other and the downtown business climate" (June 7, 2002).

After further review, the program appears to be a success although some lessons have been learned in the year since first implemented. Customers are not having as much trouble finding parking and have shared many positive comments. The community service officer plays a key role by recognizing vehicles. Businesses self police and employees have gotten tickets with their "Shopping" tag displayed because they were working and not shopping. Maintaining an accurate list of employee's primary vehicles is a constant administrative issue, but new reporting is working. Daytime parking downtown by second and third shift apartment dwellers still presents an issue. Future accommodations are planned for delivery vans and handicapped accessible employee parking.

The city administration, the police department, and Downtown West Bend Association are happy because valuable parking is now available, and business owners are seeing the benefits of "customer first" thinking. The program was good PR for the Downtown West Bend Association with city staff including the police department and with city residents.